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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate the characteristics and motivations of students entering teacher training by examining the relationship between selected student characteristics and the influences or reasons given for choosing to become a teacher. The sample of 266 students beginning an introduction to education course was found to be predominantly female (80 percent) and white, from larger families (70 percent with two or more siblings), first generation college graduates (60 percent), from smaller communities (87 percent) and families of educators (50 percent), and as being influenced in their decision to teach by liking children (85 percent), by former teachers (63 percent), and by experiences with children (59 percent). Reasons given for choosing to teach were found to be related to: gender, teaching specialty, mother's education and occupation, birth order, and the earliness of and level of assurance about their decision to teach; but the reasons given were not related to students' level of aptitude or basic academic skills, number of siblings, type of high school attended, amount of teaching-like experience, or anticipated success as a teacher. Conclusions with implications for prospective teacher recruiting, selection, and retention are enumerated. (Author)

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The Influence of Student Characteristics on Their Reasons for Entering Teacher Education

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Running Head: STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

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Abstract

This study was designed to investigate the characteristics and motivations of students entering teacher training by examining the relationship between selected student characteristics and the influences or reasons given for choosing to become a teacher. The sample of 266 students beginning an introduction to education course was found to be predominantly female (80%) and white, from larger families (70% with two or more siblings), first generation college graduates (60%), from smaller communities (87%) and families of educators (59%), and as being influenced in their decision to teach by liking children (85%), by former teachers (63%), and by experiences with children (59%). Reasons given for choosing to teach were found to be related to: gender, teaching specialty, mother's education and occupation, birth order, and the earliness of and assurance of their decision to teach; but the reasons given were not related to students' level of aptitude or basic academic skills, number of siblings, type of high school attended, amount of teaching-like experience, or anticipated success as a teacher. Conclusions with implications for prospective teacher recruiting, selection, and retention are enumerated.

The Influence of Student Characteristics on Their Reasons for Entering Teacher Education

The characteristics and motivations of those entering the teaching field have held the interest of educational researchers for over three decades. The question of what makes a good teacher has potential value in recruiting, selecting, screening, and placement of successful teachers. Studies investigating why individuals choose to teach have typically utilized measures of attitude, ability, personality, self-check questionnaires, and interviews with samples of high school and college students.

Several reviews of research completed in the 1960's and 1970's related to reasons given for choosing to become a teacher are available, thus an extensive review is not necessary here (Ryan & Phillips, 1982; Roberson, Keith, & Page, 1983; Turner, 1975; Levine, 1971). A number of general findings from this literature will be identified, however, as they relate directly to the purpose of this study. First, as is likely true in any occupational area, economic factors and changing cultural value patterns impact upon recruitment and selection in the field of teaching (Cebula & Lopes, 1982; Regan & Roland, 1982; Koch, 1972).

Second, reasons given by individuals planning to become teachers change over time (Jantzen, 1981; Wood, 1978; NEA, 1977; Levine, 1971). For example, more teacher candidates in recent years than in previous years indicate a desire to work with

children and fewer indicate attractive work schedules as an influence in deciding to become a teacher. Third, reasons given for entering teacher preparation vary somewhat between male and female candidates and also between elementary and secondary majors. Males and secondary candidates are more likely to be less enthusiastic about teaching and to view it as a stepping stone to another career. Also elementary candidates are more likely to report a desire to work with children, and secondary candidates are more likely to report an interest in a specific subject area (Fox, 1961; Levine, 1971).

Fourth, parents and school counselors are less likely to encourage men to enter a teaching career than women and are less likely to encourage academically capable rather than less capable students into teaching as a career. This may be less true, however, for parents residing in smaller communities than for parents in larger communities (Turner, 1975; Pounds & Hawkins, 1969). Fifth, the reasons given for wishing to be a teacher and the ability of the candidate tend to vary with when this career decision is made. Elementary majors tend to make their decision earlier, and those students not deciding to teach until after high school tend to be more academically capable students (Ryan & Phillips, 1982; Willcox & Beigel, 1953; Fielstra, 1955).

Sixth, teaching appears to be viewed as less than adequate employment. Males tend to see teaching as a stepping stone to

other careers while females tend to see it as secondary to rearing a family or as supplemental income for the family. This view appears to be supported by reasons given by teacher candidates as well as those teaching (Lortie, 1975). Surveys indicate that over one-half of the male teachers hold a second job during the school year and that over three-fourths hold a second job during the summer or school year (NEA, 1977). Seventh, a disportionate number of teachers come from small communities and are first generation college graduates. Thus teaching still continues to provide social upward mobility in our society (Levine, 1971; Ryan & Phillips, 1982; Haubrich, 1960).

And last, although a general demographic profile of a teacher as white, female, politically conservative, structured, less than the most capable student, small town background, internally motivated person who likes people and children may still hold true, research on teacher success and teacher characteristics indicates that teachers are not composed of a single personality type (Levine, 1971). Practicing teachers tend not to differ in personality traits from the general population, but evidence does indicate that different personality types are likely to be attracted to different areas or levels of teaching. It is also reasonable to assume that the diversity of grade levels, students, and communities demand differences in teachers. In other words, one should not expect a single characteristic or motivational

profile to be accurately descriptive of all successful teachers in all school settings.

Purpose

Much of what we now know of reasons given for entering teacher training is primarily based upon studies originally conducted over a decade ago on generally small student samples and employing limited personal and family characteristics in the analysis of the differing reasons cited by the students. Further, some research (Jantzen, 1981) suggests that these reasons vary over time. It was the purpose of this study to complete an operational replication of "reasons for becoming teachers" research on a large, current sample of teacher candidates while investigating a broader range of personal and family characteristics possibly associated with reasons given for entering teacher training.

Hypotheses

The review of the literature pertaining to reasons students give for entering the teaching field resulted in the formulation of a number of hypotheses which provided direction for the present study.

It was hypothesized that students' reasons for entering the teaching profession would not differ when analyzed by:

1. Their gender and proposed teaching area.
2. Their levels of aptitude or basic academic skills.

3. Their parental educational and occupational levels.

4. Their birth order and number of siblings.

5. The type of high school they attended and the extent of their prior teaching-type experiences.

6. Their level of assurance about their decision to become teachers and when in their lives they decided upon teaching as a career.

7. Their perceived levels of future effectiveness as teachers.

Methods and Procedures

In the Spring semester of 1985 the 266 students registered in a required orientation to the field of education course at Bowling Green State University were administered a questionnaire and several tests. This sample consisted of 212 females and 54 males of whom 96 were classified as freshmen, 119 sophomores, 36 juniors, and 15 seniors and/or degree holders.

The Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS), the Teacher Concerns Questionnaire (George, 1978), the Attitude Toward Teaching As A Career Scale (Merwin & Divesta, 1959), and the Teaching Anxiety Scale (Parsons, 1973) were administered to the students. Information from student records, such as the American College Test (ACT) scores and accumulative college grade point averages, were also obtained for this group of students. Each student also completed a two page questionnaire requesting various demographic information, such as selected major field of study,

assurance of their decision to become a teacher, amount of teaching type experience, when they first made their decision to become a teacher, and how effective they felt they would be as a teacher. In addition the students were asked to check as many as they felt appropriate among 15 influences or reasons for choosing teaching as a career.

The checklist of influences or reasons for selecting teaching as a career, as it appeared on the questionnaire, follows:

5. Who or what influenced you to choose teaching as a career?

(You may check as many as are appropriate.)

____ 31. Parents

____ 32. Other family or close relatives

____ 33. Former teacher(s)

____ 34. Peers or friends

____ 35. Newspaper articles and/or other publications

____ 36. Job security

____ 37. Professional standing of teachers

____ 38. Liking for children/want to help them/work with them

____ 39. Love of a certain subject matter or field

____ 40. Work schedule (short days, short years, vacations, etc.)

___ 41. Social prestige

___ 42. Stepping stone to another career

___ 43. Did not know what else to major in

___ 44. To change society

___ 45. Prior experience in working with youth

___ 46. (Other) _____

Findings

Student characteristics: This sample of entering teacher education students can be described as predominantly female (80%); relatively lower in math and relatively higher in natural science knowledge as measured by the ACT; relatively higher in language skills and relatively lower in math skills as measured by the CTBS; interested in elementary education (36%), secondary education (27%), and special education (19%); predominantly freshmen and sophomores (81%); from small to medium size high schools (88% from senior classes of fewer than 500 and 60% from classes of fewer than 300); from a rural or suburban community (87%); from families of teachers (59% reported that at least one relative in the present or immediate past generation is [was] a teacher); almost two-thirds of their mothers and fathers not having a four-year college degree; from somewhat larger families (70% had two or more siblings); and more than twice as likely to have their mother teaching rather than their father (20% versus 7%); very confident about their ability to teach effectively (75%

rated their future effectiveness as "unusually good" to "truly outstanding"); almost or very certain about wanting to be a teacher (85%); and most having decided that they wanted to be a teacher (70%) prior to high school graduation.

Student responses to the attitude, concerns, and anxiety scales indicated that they were most concerned about: finding teaching to be a satisfying profession, students complying with their direction, preparation of lessons, lack of instructional materials, and meeting the individual needs of students. They were least concerned or anxious about: differences in background between themselves and their students, feeling inferior to fellow college students, teachers having too many noninstructional duties, too many students in their future classes, and the routine nature and inflexibility of the teaching situation. Further, this sample saw a lot of advantages to teaching, felt confident about teaching, and disagreed with the statement that teaching is not worth the sacrifice of going to college, long work hours, and low pay.

Reasons for selecting education: The most frequently checked influences in selecting teaching as a career were: like children (85%), former teachers (63%), and prior experiences with children (59%). A second but far less frequently checked group of influences was: parents (34%), like of a subject area (34%), and desirable work schedule (32%). The least frequently checked influences were: no other field of study or interest (3%), social

prestige of teachers (4%), professional status of teachers (5%), and newsprint or other publications (5%).

Tests of hypotheses: Chi-square contingency tables (2 x k) were used in testing the hypotheses. For each respondent, and for each of the 15 reasons or influences listed on the questionnaire for becoming a teacher, a "0" was coded for a blank or a non-checked response and a "1" was coded for a checked response. These two classifications then formed the two rows of each contingency table. The "k" columns were formed by the classifications indicated in the hypotheses. Specific examples of these column classifications are: gender ("1" for males and "2" for females), proposed teaching area (4 classifications, "1" for elementary, "2" for secondary, "3" for special education, and "4" for specialized), 4 levels for parental education ("1" for high school to "4" for more than one college degree), and three classifications for when they decided to become a teacher ("1" for elementary grades, "2" for high school, and "3" for after high school).

Fifteen contingency tables (one for each of the 15 possible reasons or influences) were used in testing each of the various hypotheses. Due to the multiple tests within each hypothesis area, the null hypothesis was rejected only when differences in the response patterns on two or more (more than 13%) of the 15 influences or reasons were at or less than the .05 level of significance.

This criterion led to the acceptance of several of the null hypotheses. Specifically, it was found that the reasons students gave for wanting to become teachers did not vary significantly when categorized by their: (a) ACT scores, i.e., the reasons given by students in the three levels of ACT composite scores (high, average, and low), (b) Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) total battery scores (high, average, low), (c) type of graduating high school (rural, urban, suburban), (d) Number of siblings (1, 2, 3 or more), (e) amount of prior teaching type experience (from a "1" of little or no experience to a "4" of having done classroom observations and/or aide to teacher[s]), and (f) level of perceived future effectiveness as a teacher (from a "1" of good to a "4" of truly exceptional).

The criterion (2 or more response patterns attaining chi-square significance at or less than alpha .05) led to the rejection of seven of the null hypotheses. Namely, those null hypotheses dealing with student gender, teaching area, mother's education, mother's occupation, birth order, level of assurance about the decision to teach, and earliness of decision to choose education as a career were rejected.

The gender hypothesis was rejected as male and female response frequencies to the listing of influences differed significantly on five of the fifteen reasons. The reasons that produced significant differences between the male and female

responses are presented in the first section of Table 1. A larger percentage of males than females in the sample checked the influences of professional standing, social prestige, love of subject, and teaching as a stepping stone to other careers. Females more frequently than males checked liking children as a reason for becoming teachers.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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When the subjects were classified by their chosen teaching area (elementary, secondary, special education, or specialized), student responses to seven of the fifteen reasons differed significantly. These response differences suggest that the elementary majors were more influenced by educators in the family, liking kids, and prior experiences with children. Secondary majors were more influenced by former teachers and interest in changing society. The response patterns of the specialized area majors more closely resembled those of the secondary majors; the response patterns of the special education majors more closely resembled those of the elementary education majors. These response patterns are presented in the second part of Table 1.

When students were classified by mother's education and occupation level, two reason response patterns were significantly different for each comparison. (Differences when classified by

father's education and occupation levels were not sufficient to meet the criterion for rejecting the null hypotheses.) These response patterns are presented in the last two sections of Table 1. The students with mothers who had higher education levels, compared to those with mothers of less education, credited parents to a greater extent as a reason for them choosing to become teachers. On the other hand, students whose mothers had less education credited former teachers as a reason for them choosing a teaching career. It also appears that students were more influenced to enter education by their parents when the mother's occupation was in education; former teachers were more influential in the student's decision to become a teacher if the student's parents were not educators.

The birth order classification (first, second, third, and fourth or later born) resulted in significantly different response patterns on two items. As data in the first section of Table 2 show, former teachers seemed to have had more of an impact on second and later born in choosing education than on first born. More, first and fourth or later born, as compared to second or third born, appear to have chosen education because of love of a subject area.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Comparisons of students by level of assurance of their decision to teach (very certain, almost certain, and 50-50) revealed significantly different responses to five of the 15 listed influences. These five items and related data are presented in the middle section of Table 2. It appears that the unsure (50/50) students were more influenced by work schedule, teaching as a stepping stone, and not having another job interest and less influenced by prior experiences with children in deciding to become teachers; the very certain students less were likely to check job security as an influence than the almost certain students.

Three of the 15 item response patterns were found to be significantly different when the subjects were classified by the earliness of their decision to teach (in the elementary grades, in high school, or after high school). The responses to these items are presented in the bottom part of Table 2. It appeared that those students making their decision after high school were more influenced by love of a subject and viewing teaching as a stepping stone career. Those deciding to teach while still in the elementary grades were more influenced by prior experiences with children. Additionally, it was found that student performance on the CTBS was related to this classification. ($F = 6.30$, $df = 2,189$, $p = .002$). Pair-wise comparisons using the Scheffe test at the .05 level identified a significant mean difference

between students deciding in high school (M = 168.02, S.D. = 33.1, N = 96) and those deciding to teach after their high school years (M = 187.26, S.D. = 25.17, N = 46).

Discussion and Significance

The analysis of student responses to the list of 15 reasons or influences for becoming a teacher when classified by student characteristics revealed several significant differences. The null hypotheses dealing with student gender, teaching area, mother's education, mother's occupation, birth order, level of assurance about the decision to teach, and earliness of decision to choose education as a career were rejected. Several student classifications, however, did not produce significant differences on two or more of the 15 listed reasons or influences; this resulted in accepting the null hypotheses dealing with: aptitude, basic academic skills, type of graduating high school, number of siblings, amount of prior teaching-type experience, and level of perceived effectiveness as a future teacher.

The sample like those of several prior studies was largely composed of white, female, first generation college students, from families with members in education, from small to medium size high schools, and from somewhat larger families. Similarly, the reasons identified for becoming a teacher were compatible with other studies revealing fewer reasons given for extrinsic job related factors such as job security or work schedule and more frequent

reasons given for intrinsic reward factors such as experience with children and liking children.

This sample of prospective students reported being anxious about teaching being a satisfying career, students following their direction, and their impact upon students; but they reported little concern about differences between themselves and their students, having too many students in their future classes, or having too many nonteaching duties. They appeared to be concerned about major career and student outcomes at this stage but not yet concerned about specific job or situation problems. They did, however, report the belief that teaching would be worth the sacrifices of going to college, long work hours, and low pay.

This study and those reviewed would appear to suggest several generalizations for those wishing to understand or improve prospective teacher recruiting, selection, and retention practices: (a) More academically capable students tend to be less certain of teaching as a career. (b) More academically capable students tend to be more influenced by career related conditions and love of subject matter. (c) First born tend to be more subject matter oriented. (d) Most prospective teachers entering their first required education course are very confident about their decision to teach. (e) Successful experiences with children and classroom like situations appear to favorably influence ones decision to teach. (f) Most prospective teachers appear to be more influenced

by the intrinsic rather than the extrinsic rewards of teaching, except perhaps those deciding to teach after their high school graduation. (g) Parents, especially better educated fathers from larger communities, may not encourage their children, especially capable male children, to become teachers. (h) The teaching profession still appears to be a means of upward mobility for many families in our society. (i) It appears that women rather than men and smaller high schools in rural and suburban areas will continue to be the major sources of prospective teachers. (j) Prospective teachers report strong concerns about intrinsic job factors such as career satisfaction and impact on students but much less concern about future job situations such as too many students per class or too many nonteaching duties. (k) Most students decide to become teachers prior to high school graduation. (l) Family members in education and teachers are a major influence on those selecting teaching as a career. (m) Most students entering teacher training appear to be very confident of their effectiveness as a future teacher but have reservations about teaching being a satisfying career.

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Table 1

Reasons/Influences Which Were Selected Disproportionately by Students in Different Sub-Classifications

Classification: Gender (N)

		Male (54)		Female (212)		p
	Reasons	f	%	f	%	
37	Teachers' Professional Standing	6	11	4	2	.002
38	Like Children	20	37	136	64	.0001
39	Love of Subject	18	33	45	21	.01
41	Social Prestige	4	7	3	1	.02
42	Stepping Stone	8	15	12	6	.02

Classification: Teaching Area (N)

		Elem (72)		HiSch (41)		SpEd (40)		SpecAs (29)		
	Reasons	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	p
32	Family, relative	23	32	2	5	7	18	7	24	.008
33	Former teachers	39	54	34	83	24	60	17	59	.02
37	Professional standing	3	4	6	15	0	0	1	3	.02
38	Liking children	69	96	28	68	36	90	21	72	.0002
39	Love subject	8	11	31	76	8	20	15	52	.0001
44	Change society	4	6	8	20	3	8	0	0	.02
45	Experience kids	52	72	17	41	24	60	14	48	.006

(table continues)

Classification: Mother's Education (N)

		HiSch (82)		Hi+ (39)		Degree (46)		Degree + (11)		
	Reasons	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	p
31	Parents	17	21	11	28	25	54	8	73	.0001
33	Former teachers	56	68	26	67	26	57	3	27	.05

Classification: Mother's Occupation (N)

		In Educ (34)		Othr Prof (17)		Other (133)		
	Reasons	f	%	f	%	f	%	p
31	Parents	28	82	3	27	31	23	.0001
33	Former teachers	15	44	13	76	88	66	.03

Table 2

Reasons/Influences Which Were Selected Disproportionately by Students in Different Sub-Classifications

Classification: Birth Order (N)

	First (60)		Second (52)		Third (37)		Later (33)		
Reasons	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	p
32 Former teachers	5	8	13	25	12	32	10	30	.01
39 Love of subject	24	40	14	27	8	22	17	51	.03

Classification: Certainty of Teaching (N)

	Very Ctn (93)		Alm Ctn (70)		50/50 (19)		
Reasons	f	%	f	%	f	%	p
36 Job security	2	2	9	13	1	5	.02
40 Work schedule	32	34	16	23	10	53	.04
42 Stepping stone career	7	8	7	10	6	32	.006
43 No other interest	0	0	3	4	2	11	.02
45 Experience kids	59	63	45	64	3	16	.0006

Classification: Time of Decision (N)

	Elem (40)		Hi Sch (97)		After Hi Sch (45)		
Reasons	f	%	f	%	f	%	p
39 Love subject	12	30	28	29	23	52	.03
42 Stepping stone career	0	0	8	8	12	27	.0002
45 Experience kids	30	75	56	58	22	49	.04

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